

Suddenly, It Was No More

There were a few tears, a few wry jokes. But mostly, the men and women at the Daily News just stood around in small groups, talking quietly, a bit dazed.

Word of the paper's death had come with stunning suddenness. One minute everyone was busy at a typewriter, on the phone, in the dark-room, absorbed in the countless tasks that make up the barely controlled hysteria of a newspaper on deadline. The next minute, the typewriters were still, phones rang unanswered—only the presses and the circulation trucks kept running, in a kind of ghostly afterlife.

There had been rumors, of course, for months. Rumors of merger, combined operations or a change to morning publication. But nobody at the News had really expected the worst.

"It's like any death," said Richard Hollander, News editor. "We all know we're going to die, but it always comes as a great surprise."

Hollander knew sooner than most—though he wouldn't say exactly when he learned that his paper was finished. In the absence of News president Ray S. Mack, who is vacationing in Europe, Hollander early yesterday put the required signature on the legal document.

Like the disaster victims they have photographed and written about so many times, the newsroom employees took a certain solace in remembering the inconsequential details of the day.

"I was out to lunch, and when I came back. . . ."

"It was my day off, and I just came in to pick up my paycheck. . . ."

"When I pulled up in front of the building and saw a television crew on the sidewalk, I thought, 'Uh-oh, this is it. . . .'"

FOR SOME—an elite of dubious distinction—it was the second time around. Eighteen years ago, they had come to the News when the Times-Herald folded.

"I didn't worry much that time," said Wellner Streets, a photographer. "But I'm 54 now. That's a little old for this kind of thing."

"You're used to it, Betty," a desk man said to Betty Vitol in mock envy. An editorial artist, she was another survivor of the Times-Herald demise.

"I've been on vacation," she said. "I came downtown to get my check, and I arranged to meet another girl for lunch at Camille's. They made the announcement just before she left the building to meet me." Some lunch.

Miss Vitol was taking it philosophically. "I learned 18 years ago that it's best not to make too many plans."

There had to be a wake, of course, and the News mourners held theirs at their longtime waterhole across 13th Street—Matt Kane's Irish pub. It was no riotous, raucous beer bust out of

"The Last Hurrah." They were, like Adlai Stevenson, too big to cry—but it hurt too much to laugh.

FOR SOME, there will be little more than the emotional shock of seeing their paper disappear, and the inconvenience of moving across town to jobs at the Evening Star.

A number of editorial employees from the News will join The Star. For some others, it means looking around in an ever-shrinking job market, with severance pay to cushion the blow—two weeks' pay for each year at the News.

In the Star newsroom, emotions were mixed. Relief was probably paramount.

"I don't know whether to go to a celebration or a wake," sighed Star reporter David Holmberg as his former colleagues from the News began hopefully trickling into The Star newsroom.

Such mixed reactions were common throughout the five-story Star building from the moment at 12:29 p.m. when Managing Editor Charles B. Seib tacked up the well-guarded announcement in the newsroom—ending months of widespread rumors about the fate of both newspapers.

IN MOST OTHER business enterprises, the snuffing out of a rival would clearly seem the occasion for smug smiles, cheers, or even champagne.

But at The Evening Star yesterday, as at scores of big-city newspapers which have survived merger announcements since the advent of television, the mood was distinctly sober.

A peculiarly kindred breed linked by common craft and professional concerns, reinforced by unions and, still deeper, bound by a sportsman-type love for their game, the city surviving afternoon newspaper people kept saying how much they hated to see it happen—the News people out of work, the loss in principle of another media voice in the Nation's Capital.

"It's sad. It's sad as hell," said The Star's Dave Burgin on learning that he is once again the city's youngest newspaper sports editor. (At 33, he's three weeks older than News sports editor Bucky Summers, who joins The Star staff today. Burgin, ironically, was sports editor at the News five years ago and hired Summers there.)

LIKE OLDER HANDS throughout the newspaper business, Burgin himself has been on the jobless end of newspaper mergers—in his case, at the old New York Herald Tribune; in the case of some Star employees, at the old Washington Times-Herald.

Within minutes of the posting of the announcement from Star President John H. Kauffmann, Star employees from ad salesmen to Pulitzer Prize winning reporters were peppering their immediate superiors with questions.

"Evening Star—Washington Daily News?" mouthed telephone operator Millie Pitsenbarger for the first time. "We ain't say all that. . . ."

Despite their much-prized reputation for sleuthing out big news stories, Star reporters as a whole—like their colleagues at the News and Post—seemed to have little reliable information about the purchase before it was officially announced, although the rumors were legion.

Some weeks ago, it was rumored that the News was buying The Star, or, in a later version, that the News would become a morning paper in some combination with The Star. Few predicted the News' immediate demise.

Whether through innate shrewdness or female intuition, vacationing women's news reporter Diana McLellan

hit the nail on the head in a postcard which her Daily News co-workers were passing around the office yesterday morning.

London's "as glittering as ever," reported Diana, signing off with a bit of jittery jest: "And I hope Ann Crutcher (the News' Portfolio editor) is not sitting at my desk when I get back."

Mrs. Crutcher is among those lucky News employees for whom desks are being set up at The Star today.

MORI/CDF